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THE AFRICAN PROBLEM.

BY EDWARD W. BLYDEN, LIBERIAN MINISTER TO THE COURT OF
ST. JAMES'S.

THE African problem in Africa, which has puzzled a hundred generations of Europeans, is now engaging the earnest attention and taxing the energies of all the powers of Europe. The decision of the Berlin Conference, ten years ago, has placed Europe in relations to Africa such as never before existed between these continents. Every power of Europe, including Russia, has established or is seeking to establish interests in Africa.

The African problem in America, which has existed since the day the first negro landed in Virginia three hundred years ago, instead of losing its interest as the years go by, is deepening in importance and demanding more and more the serious consideration of the people of the United States.

Gratefully availing myself of the opportunity which the courtesy of the Editor of this REVIEW has placed at my disposal, I venture to present to the American public the view of these problems at which the study and travel of years both here and in Africa have enabled me to arrive.

Fifty years ago there was no part of the world of which less was known than the interior of Africa, and in which less interest was taken. When the Landers had achieved their great exploit of proving by actual observation that the Niger had an outlet to the sea and that its banks on both sides were occupied by vast and active populations, their discoveries were not received with half the interest which is now aroused by excavations in the valley of the Euphrates or on the banks of the Nile. The *Edinburgh Review* of that day (July, 1832), rebuked the "very rigid parsimony" of a government which rewarded the labors of the enterprising travellers by a gratuity of *one hundred pounds*; but

those labors were the prelude of all the modern activity in African exploration and exploitation. The English, as the first of commercial nations, could not rest without ascertaining the natural capacities of a country known to be populous, and without endeavoring to open new and easier routes of communication with it. For the series of explorations which has, within the last thirty or forty years, filled up the larger part of what used to be blank spaces in our maps of Africa, we are indebted almost altogether to the intelligence and enterprise of British travellers—from Livingstone in 1849, to Captain Lugard in 1895. But the conferences of the great powers at Berlin in 1884-5, and at Brussels in 1890, assumed for Europe the continent of Africa as its special field of operation. The “scramble” is over, and now the question is how to utilize the plunder in the interests of civilization and progress.

France has taken the lead by military operations. England has begun her work through chartered companies destined to end in protectorates. Germany has blended the military with the commercial *régime*. But each is proceeding cautiously and learning the best methods by daily experience. They are gradually repairing the waste places and teaching the natives to make the best possible use of their own country, by fitting it up for their own prosperity and preparing it for the exiles in distant lands who may desire to return to the ancestral home.

The task which Europe has imposed upon itself is a vast one—surpassing the labors of Hercules. But intelligence, energy and science will cleanse the Augean stables—the swamps and morasses which disfigure and poison the coast regions. They will destroy the Lernean hydra of African fever. They will bring the golden apples from the hidden gardens of the wealthy interior.

France, in the conquest of Dahomey, has performed a task which civilization has long needed. She has freed a great country from the cruel savagery of ages and thrown it open to the regenerating influence of enlightened nations. The king, who was bound hand and foot by the sanguinary superstitions of his fathers, was relieved by the military energy of the French from his blood-thirsty responsibility, and is now ending his days in bloodless luxury and quiet in the French colony of Martinique, supported like a king at the expense of his captors and de-

porters. Abomey, his capital, closed for hundreds of years against civilizing agencies, is now the centre of stable rule, of educational and industrial impulse. Mohammedan missionaries, formerly refused admission for religious work, are now directing the attention of besotted pagans to the "Lord of the universe."

The French are assiduous in the administration of the affairs of the countries which, by the decision of the Berlin conference, have fallen within their "sphere of influence." When, by conquest or treaty, they have acquired any territory, they spare no pains in its exploitation and development. The sons of powerful chiefs whom they have conquered in what is now called French Soudan are sent to France or North Africa for education to fit them on their return to take charge of their respective countries and govern them under French supervision in the interest of order and progress. Several Mohammedan youth, the sons of chiefs, were sent last year from Senegal to the Moslem College at Kairawan for education. Natives of intelligence and capacity are promoted to high official positions, and have the Legion of Honor conferred upon them.

England is entering upon her part of the work, not as a stranger. For more than a hundred years she has been engaged in direct recuperative work, having provided Sierra Leone, after abolishing the slave trade, as an asylum for recaptured slaves. In this colony, as well as in those of Gambia, the Gold Coast and Lagos, she has expended vast amounts of money and sacrificed numberless English lives. She has very recently increased her political responsibilities in Western Soudan by taking within her jurisdiction the powerful kingdom of Ashantee, with which she has waged such frequent and expensive wars with results by no means discreditable to her native antagonists. Under the name of the Niger Coast Protectorate, England has also taken the whole of the Niger delta through which flow the great Oil Rivers or estuaries of Benin, Brass, Bonny, Opobo, New Calabar and Old Calabar. There is one feature in which the Niger may defy competition from any other river, either of the old or new world. This is the grandeur of its delta, which is probably the most insalubrious region in all of West Africa. Along the whole coast, from Benin to Old Calabar, a distance of about 300 miles, the Niger makes its way to the Atlantic through the various estuaries just enumerated. Had this delta, like that of

the Nile, been subject only to periodical inundations, leaving behind a layer of fertilizing slime, it would have formed the most fruitful region on earth, and might have been almost the granary of a continent. But the Niger rolls down its waters in such excessive abundance as to convert the whole into a dreary swamp. This is covered with dense forests of mangrove and other trees of spreading and luxuriant foliage. The equatorial sun, with its fiercest rays, cannot penetrate these dark recesses; it only draws forth from them pestilential vapors, which render this coast more fatal than any other. There is not, however, the slightest doubt, now that British enterprise under government protection has access to that region, that in the course of time those forests will be leveled, those swamps drained, and the soil covered with luxuriant harvests.

Sir Claude Macdonald, to whom was entrusted four or five years ago the duty of establishing the Niger Coast Protectorate, of organizing regular government and enforcing order in that region, has performed his difficult task with admirable ability. He has in that short time created a revenue which more than suffices for the work of administration. He has abolished barbarous customs and suppressed marauding practices. The natives, he has discovered, have a perfect knowledge and appreciation of the immense industrial resources of their country, and a readiness to take advantage of them, together with an aptitude for imitation and a desire for instruction, which are most hopeful indications of progress. They are encouraged to spontaneous activity, and to a love of achievement from which important results must before long accrue. The progress has been rapid as well as steady; and may be measured from month to month, almost from day to day.

The Royal Niger Company, which has brought within British influence vast and important territories, will now, probably, like the British East Africa Company, pass into the hands of the British Government. As this company has been governed by strictly commercial principles, it is feared, from recent occurrences, that the welfare of the native population may be sacrificed to the interest of the shareholders. Perhaps it may be best for all concerned that the regions in question should come under the strict control of a Protectorate, if not formed into a Crown colony.

Germany, considering her inexperience in colonial matters, is developing astounding ability and resources as a colonizing power.

Her recent decided step, in behalf of native protection, in the punishment of Herr Leist for his abuse of official power in maltreating the natives at Cameroon, has satisfied the people as to her intentions and aims.

Every one has confidence in the philanthropic aims and political and commercial efforts of the King of the Belgians in the arduous and expensive enterprise he has undertaken on the Congo. But none of these powers has any idea of making Africa a home for its citizens. They know that European colonists cannot live in that country. Nature has marked off tropical Africa as the abiding home of the black races. I have met no European agent, either political, commercial or industrial, who thinks that there is any chance for Europeans to occupy inter-tropical Africa. All that Europe can do is to keep the peace among the tribes, giving them the order and security necessary to progress; while the emissaries of religion, industry and trade teach lessons of spiritual and secular life. The bulk of the continent is still untouched by Western civilization, notwithstanding the fact that Africa has been partitioned among the European powers—on paper.

It is an interesting fact that Liverpool, which, in the days of the slave trade, took so prominent a part in the nefarious traffic, is doing more than any other city to push the enterprises of reconstruction into the continent. Her steamship companies and her Chamber of Commerce are the most potent of the European agencies in the work of African regeneration. And both are doing all in their power to bring the natives forward and assist them to develop and take care of their own country. It is commonly supposed that the liquor traffic is decimating the African tribes. There is no doubt that much mischief is done among some of the coast tribes who are in immediate contact with foreign trade. But, notwithstanding the large quantities of vile spirits introduced, very little finds its way to the interior. In my journeys to the *hinterland* of Liberia and Sierra Leone, I have been astonished to find that all evidences of the malignant traffic disappear after one gets about a hundred miles from the coast. Beyond that distance the people, as a rule, are ignorant of the nature or use of ardent spirits. It would be impossible to explain to those of them who have not visited the seaboard the character and purposes of a public house or a rum shop. On returning to the coast

the unfailing signs of approach to a European settlement or to so-called civilization are empty gin bottles and demijohns. There are three reasons for this exemption of the interior tribes from the blighting traffic.

In the first place, the population of the coast towns and of regions adjacent to the coast are so large, and the love for drink, cultivated for generations, is so strong among them, that all the importations are swallowed up in the maritime districts. Yet each individual seems to have access to so little of this fire-water that it is very rare to see any one "the worse for liquor." Then, the inhabitants of the elevated and healthy regions, robust in body and mind, are satisfied with the natural beverages of the country, and do not crave foreign or abnormal stimulants. Lastly, the people who control the volume of trade in the Soudan are Mohammedans to whom the use of ardent spirits is forbidden by their religion under the severest penalties. But for this fact, the scourge of liquor, whose ravages in the maritime districts Mungo Park deplored a hundred years ago, and the Landers animadverted upon thirty years later, would long since have exterminated or debased millions of that vast multitude who, under the protection of Islam, are increasing in numbers.

Enlightened Christian sentiment in Europe and America is working towards the entire suppression of the demoralizing traffic. The *aborigines* of Africa, then, taking into consideration all the agencies at work, are not likely to share the deplorable fate of the *aborigines* of this country, Australia and New Zealand.

It used to be fashionable some years ago to make disparaging comments upon the home industry of the Africans. Men posing as great commercial authorities informed the world that the trade of Africa was very small and not likely to increase. They assigned as a reason for this opinion that a savage people, living in a climate where clothing is unnecessary and where food can be obtained with little or no labor, would not exert themselves to procure imported articles which they do not absolutely require. But such opinions arose from completely erroneous ideas of the social condition of the African nations generally, and of the degree of civilization in the interior of that continent. Within the last twenty years these views have been completely exploded. Steamers and sailing ships from all the ports of Europe now hug

the coast for more than two thousand miles, and carry away every day to Europe in exchange for cash and European goods large quantities of native products, such as vegetable oils, palm kernels, piassava, camwood, mahogany, cotton, ivory, hides, coffee, timber, gums, wax and gold. Horses and cattle, sheep, goats, etc., are also brought to the coast for sale.

The able and experienced officers now administering the government of the British Colonies in West Africa—notably Col. Frederic Cardew, of Sierra Leone, and Sir Gilbert Carter, of Lagos—are earnestly recommending the construction of railways from the coast to the interior, their travels to the *hinterland* having convinced them that vast resources may soon be developed by increased facilities of intercourse and transportation. A few weeks ago a deputation from the Manchester, Liverpool, and London Chambers of Commerce waited upon the Secretary of State for the Colonies to urge upon Her Majesty's Government the immediate establishment of railways to meet the growing demands of the trade. Of all this valuable and increasing commerce the voluntary industry of the natives is the only basis.

Africa produces in unlimited quantities articles of prime necessity to civilization, which can not be obtained in anything like the same quantities from any other country.

In the interior the natives have reached a degree of civilization not suspected by the outside world. Most of the tribes have fixed habitations and defences round their towns; they cultivate their lands; they wear cotton dresses of their own manufacture, dyed with native dyes; and they work in iron and gold. The native loom is very primitive, but the native cotton is excellent. The native cotton dresses are much thicker and better than any produced in Manchester, whose manufacturers try hard to imitate them. The African dyes are far brighter and more enduring than the foreign. The African indigo is said to resist the action of light and acids better than any other. Still, the interior Africans, who are a great trading people, patronize foreign goods and are multiplying their purchasing power. The beneficial effects of trade are now perceived for hundreds of miles around the settlements, large tracts of land having been brought under cultivation.

The introduction of foreign cloth into the interior instead of diminishing the manufacture of the native article has increased

it, and it more than holds its own side by side with the foreign product, the natives decidedly preferring the African original to the European imitation, and paying much higher prices for it. They sometimes buy English "bafts"—the trade term for the pieces of cotton of which their dresses are made—which are a clever imitation of their own make, but only because they are very much cheaper. As long as the Africans retain their superiority in manufacturing cotton goods, foreign competition will not interfere with the work produced by their primitive appliances.

They also manufacture their own agricultural implements from iron taken from the soil. They make beautiful gold trinkets and their workmanship in that metal is not only curious, but often really beautiful. The gold mines of Bouré, in the interior of Sierra Leone, and others in the interior of Liberia, yield abundantly with the application of very little labor or capital.

There is nothing in Africa resembling the poverty which one sees in Europe. The natives in some regions plant a portion of their land especially for the stranger and wayfarer, so that they can indulge in a hospitality unknown in civilized countries—a genuine and unpremeditated hospitality. Cameron, the English traveller, author of "Across Africa," told me that on one occasion when in the heart of the continent, several weeks' journey from the coast, his supplies gave out and he had nothing to offer the natives in exchange for the necessities of life; but he experienced no inconvenience, much less suffering. He was the object of abundant and assiduous hospitality from people who had never seen him before and who would never see him again. "In what country of Europe or America," he asked, "would such a thing be possible?"

Great as have been the changes which have taken place during the last ten years in the condition of Africa so far as its relation to Europe is concerned, vaster changes still are impending in connection with the central portion of the continent—a region of incalculable extent which seems still fresh, as it were, from the hands of God and only waiting for the energies of civilized man to bring to perfection the numerous products of its prolific soil.

The feeling for progress and achievement awakened and impelled by enlightened and vigorous government on the coast must lead to important results in the near future, which cannot

but have a decided and salutary influence, not only upon the people at home, but upon the condition of their children in exile in foreign lands. But development and progress in Africa will linger until the United States, both government and people, black and white, take a wider and deeper practical interest in the affairs of that continent. Europe cannot do what America can for Africa.

We have thus far been considering what Europe is doing in and for Africa. We now come to those efforts in that continent which are of more immediate interest to the public of the United States. The Republic of Liberia owes its origin to American benevolence. It is the only spot in Africa where the civilized negro—the American negro—without alien supervision or guidance is holding aloft the torch of civilization and the symbol of Christianity, endeavoring to establish government on principles recognized by the civilized world and in international relations with the leading nations: a country to which thousands of Africa's descendants in the Southern States are looking as the only place where they can obtain relief from their disabilities, and a field for the unhindered cultivation and untrammelled development of their peculiar gifts as a people.

The discussion of this subject will lead to a brief consideration of the African problem in this country. The statesmen who organized the government of the United States were as clear as to the nature of the present race problem, which their sagacity recognized from afar, as are the statesmen of to-day—perhaps clearer. Thomas Jefferson foresaw the emancipation of the slave, and he foresaw also the difficulties—insuperable difficulties—that must attend the residence in one country of two distinct races to whom intermarriage and social equality would be impossible. One race ruling and dominant, the other possessing no birthright of power, there being between them no such sympathy as would make their interests everywhere and always identical. He, therefore, conceived the idea of a separation, and some of his contemporaries or immediate successors, laid the foundation of a society for the deportation of the blacks to the land of their fathers—not, as some of their opponents at that time suggested, to rivet more securely the fetters of the slave, but to provide an asylum and a field of operation for the freed man.

The American Colonization Society was organized in 1817 in

the city of Washington, where it is still represented by an office, an executive committee, a secretary and treasurer. The society sent out the first emigrants in 1820, and in 1821 founded the colony which they called Liberia—land of the free. The capital of the colony was called Monrovia after President Monroe, who gave practical aid to the enterprise.

The ship "Elizabeth," the "Mayflower" of Liberian history, sailed from New York, having on board eighty-eight emigrants, on the 6th of February, 1820. She had favoring breezes and made the voyage in about thirty days, arriving at Sierra Leone March 9. The immigrants, after trying several localities in the neighborhood of Sierra Leone, at length obtained a foothold at Cape Mesurado, about 260 miles southeast of Sierra Leone, where they established the settlement of Monrovia.

In 1847 they became an independent republic upon the model of the United States. This responsibility was forced upon the colony by the anomaly of its position. Founded and fostered by a private society, with no official recognition from the United States Government, it was exposed to, and was frequently the victim of, impositions from unscrupulous slave traders and others who would not respect the laws enacted by the colony. Under these circumstances it, of course, looked for official recognition as a nation to the United States, but, owing to the "peculiar institution," such recognition could not be granted. It subsequently sought and obtained acknowledgment from Great Britain and other European powers, under the name and style of the Republic of Liberia.

The natural advantages of the country in the way of soil and climate place it in the front rank of West African countries. Every visitor sees at a glance the immense possibilities of the youthful nation—agricultural, mineral, commercial and political. What it now needs is capital and intelligent negro immigrants from the western hemisphere—farmers, mechanics, preachers and school teachers.

An unfortunate law, which the founders of the State considered necessary to its integrity and protection, excludes the white man from citizenship. The state of the world and the relations of the races when this exclusive enactment was passed, sixty or seventy years ago—made, by the way, *for* the colonists by white American citizens—no doubt furnished a reason and an excuse

for it. But in a few more years it may come within the range of Liberian practical politics to modify, if not altogether abolish, that law as being behind the spirit of the age, and obstructive.

Since the founding of Liberia, seventy-four years ago, not quite twenty thousand negroes all told have gone to that colony. And yet in spite of this limited immigration and in spite of the fact that they have had very little foreign aid, they have brought into operation upon that coast, which they found in a wild and savage state, such agencies, political, commercial and industrial, that they were thought worthy, about fifty years ago, to be received into the family of nations and have ever since been performing, without discredit, the functions of national life. They are in treaty relations with all the great powers of Europe, with the United States and other American nationalities. They have diplomatic and consular officers in Europe and America. Commercially they attract steamships and sailing ships from the principal European ports.

The culture of coffee is extending in Liberia, and several of her citizens, immigrants from the United States, who went out with very small capital or none at all, and devoted themselves to agriculture, are now in affluent circumstances.

In presenting these facts it is not my purpose to urge any to go to Liberia. I believe that the interest and sympathy which have been awakened among the negroes of the South preclude any necessity for such a stimulant. If the United States government would supply the means thousands would rush to that country. No warnings, admonitions or predictions of possible disaster would deter them. They would rush forth in unthinking multitudes and precipitate upon themselves and upon the unfortunate country which admitted them a state of things the horrors of which it would not be possible to exaggerate. No greater evil could befall Africa or the negro race at the present time than an exodus of negroes from the United States.

I do not ignore the sad aspects of the condition of the race here. We hear nearly every day of acts being perpetrated upon negroes in certain sections of the country which drive some to say, "Anywhere but here." These acts are deplorable; perhaps, in many instances, indefensible; but certainly dangerous and pernicious to the last degree, not to blacks only but to whites also. But emigration will not cure these evils. They are symp-

toms of a disease which can be eradicated only by a wider and deeper education of blacks and whites alike.

The present generation of white men and the present generation of black men must pass away. A new generation of each race, strangers to the abnormal facts of slavery and its monstrous offshoots, must arise before any extensive colonization of American blacks in Africa can answer its great purpose. The negro problem must be solved here or it will reappear in Africa in a new form. The negro must learn to respect himself here before he will be able to perform the functions of true manhood there. Should he leave this country now, harrassed and cowed, broken in spirit and depressed, ashamed of his racial peculiarities and deprecating everything intended for his racial preservation, he would be destitute of the tenacity and force, the self-reliance and confidence, the faith in himself and in his destiny, which, as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, would guide him in the policy to be adopted toward the man like himself whom he will find on his ancestral continent.

A handful of people on the margin of the continent is a very different thing from a million with imperfect views of themselves and their work. But will the negro ever attain to full manhood under a dominant race? No; not now. On one hand, all those who held him as a slave and their children, and on the other, all those who felt the iron of slavery penetrate their souls and *their* children, must pass away before things will reach a somewhat normal state.

I consider, therefore, that all agitation for the movement of large masses of negroes to Africa is at the present time unwise and premature. Not so, however, the effort to awaken a missionary spirit among the blacks, and to diffuse information which will stimulate effort on that line, and induce individuals, or small colonies, to go out with some definite object in view for the religious or industrial improvement of the country. Meanwhile, everything should be avoided by the masses who remain which would aggravate the situation, and everything studied and pursued which makes for peace and harmony. What I would inculcate upon the negro in the United States now is a modest temperateness of behavior—an unpretentious and unambitious deportment, which is not only in accordance with the tendencies of his own nature left to itself, but is, I consider, the chief and soundest

blessing to which his destinies in America invite him. Politics at present is not his field. He is as yet but a newcomer in the arena of even personal freedom—not more than a generation from chattelism. The fact is, I do not believe that the masses of the negroes in the South, *when let alone*, trouble themselves about politics; they are very little disposed to take part in a strife which to them is barren, uninteresting and often perilous; and it is to be regretted if any extraneous influence should be brought to bear upon them to turn into partisanship what, under the circumstances, must be considered a salutary indifference. He can bide his time. He will not die out—he is not dying out. According to the Census Bulletin No. 48, it appears that the colored population increased from 1880 to 1890, 856,800; or 85,680 a year, about 243 a day, or 10 an hour. Such agencies as that at Tuskegee, under Mr. Booker T. Washington, which are preparing him for his work in this country and in Africa, if he goes there, should be encouraged. All bitterness and darkness of spirit, all sour unreasonableness, should be laid aside. By his cheerful, musical spirit, and by all that is implied in his inimitable gift of song, the negro may construct for himself here, to be taken with him when he goes to Africa, walls within which will dwell peace and palaces within which will be plenteousness. And when the time comes for the departure of large numbers—for anything like an exodus—the separation of the races will be marked by affectionate regrets on both sides.

EDWARD W. BLYDEN.